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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF CURRENT INTELLIGENCE
21 May 1953RELATIVE INFLUENCE OF THE SOVIET UNION
AND COMMUNIST CHINA IN NORTH KOREA

The Soviet Union has been exercising supreme authority in North Korean affairs and undoubtedly makes the final policy decisions regarding North Korea's role in international affairs. There are no indications that the war has altered North Korea's allegiance to Moscow or produced serious Sino-Soviet disagreements over the control of Korea. Future differences cannot be entirely discounted, however, in view of the increase in Chinese Communist influence in North Korea during China's two and one-half year intervention there.

The Soviet Union has completely dominated North Korea since its "liberation" by Soviet troops in 1945. After the withdrawal of Soviet forces in 1948, Soviet control was maintained by placing Soviet Koreans in government posts and by attaching Soviet advisers to government ministries and North Korean army units. Soviet support of the Communist military effort, even since the Chinese intervention, has probably enabled the Soviet Union to maintain its predominant influence over North Korean affairs.

Since 1950, however, the Chinese Communists have increased their participation in North Korean matters, primarily in the military and economic fields. The Chinese undoubtedly direct tactical, transport, and logistic activities in the war by their dominant position in the joint Sino-Korean military headquarters. They have enhanced their influence in the North Korean army by integrating Chinese troops into Korean units and by indoctrinating Korean political liaison officers serving with Chinese military organizations.

Although Communist China reportedly desires to increase its economic influence in North Korea, its dependence upon the Soviet Union for its own economic reconstruction will undoubtedly limit China's efforts.

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Politically, Chinese gains have not been extensive. While Premier Kim Il-sung's public statements give increasing recognition to China's participation in the war, Soviet advisers continue to occupy key advisory roles in the North Korean government and there is no evidence of comparable Chinese advisers.

Evidence of Soviet control in civic affairs was shown late last year when Moscow presented the North Korean Labor Party with important new instructions for tightening party organizations without coordinating this matter with China. On 27 March, following a similar shift in the Soviet Union, the North Korean regime merged the Ministry of Public Security with the Ministry of Interior. This merger, which relegated the Yenan-trained Public Security Minister to an obscure role and placed a Soviet-oriented Korean in charge of the combined ministry, was interpreted as a Soviet removal of Chinese influence from the Korean intelligence system.

There is no evidence that friction has developed between Peiping and Moscow over the prosecution of the war. Even if a cease-fire is concluded, both the Soviet and Chinese leaders will probably consider the continued strengthening of Sino-Soviet bonds and a joint anti-Western program to be of first importance. Moreover, the military and economic dependence of China upon the Soviet Union, as well as the presence of Soviet advisers in Manchuria, affords Moscow a strong bargaining position for persuading the Chinese to give up their newly-won position in Korea and accept such other considerations as increased economic and military aid for China's industrialization.

Eventually, however, the question of primary influence in North Korea may produce some strains in the Sino-Soviet relationship. The control of Korea is important to both parties for reasons of prestige and in terms of each power's future influence with Japan. Chinese inability to obtain satisfaction from the West concerning the status of Formosa and international recognition of China as a price for a cease-fire may cause the Chinese leaders to resent a return to the 1950 status quo in Korea.

While Moscow would probably view the prospect of Chinese dominance in Korea with disfavor, it may be that the Soviet Union is no longer completely free to restore North Korea as a "model" Soviet Satellite. From Moscow's viewpoint, it is vastly more important to maintain the harmony between Chinese and Soviet long-range interests and objectives, than to seek to restore its original position in North Korea arbitrarily.

Should the Chinese, for reasons of prestige, seek to retain some measure of vested interests in Korea, Moscow may consider it expedient to accept Chinese proposals in order to avoid jeopardizing its invaluable alliance with China. Accordingly, the new balance of influence and control in Korea may result primarily from a careful weighing by the Kremlin, mindful of its experience with Tito, of the political and psychological factors produced by China's successful reassertion of Communist control of North Korea.